

LACHIT BARPHUKAN

King Jayadhwaja Singh of Assam was worried. The Mughal general Mir Jumla had successfully attacked one of his forts. The king's only hope was Lachit, his brave brother-in-law who was also the commander of his army. Though the strain of keeping his country together killed Jayadhwaja, Lachit Barphukan led a brilliant and brave campaign against the Mughals and saved the honour of his king and his country. Lachit's story is chronicled in Assamese texts called *Buranjis*.

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LACHIT BARPHUKAN

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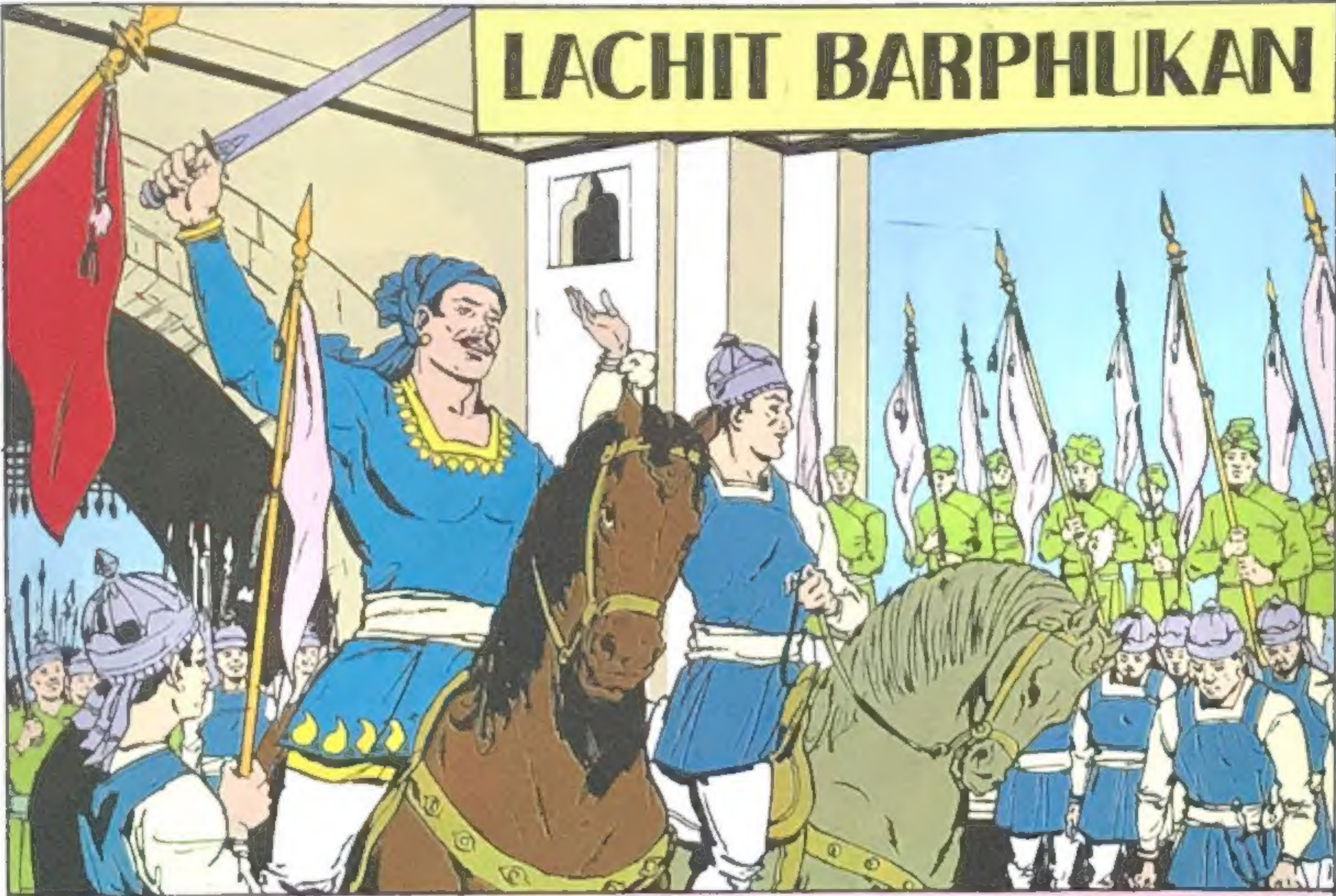


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LACHIT BARPHUKAN



THE YEAR WAS 1663. A JUBILANT LACHIT AT THE HEAD OF HIS VICTORIOUS ARMY, ENTERED GARGAON, THE CAPITAL OF THEIR HOME-STATE, ASSAM. BUT —

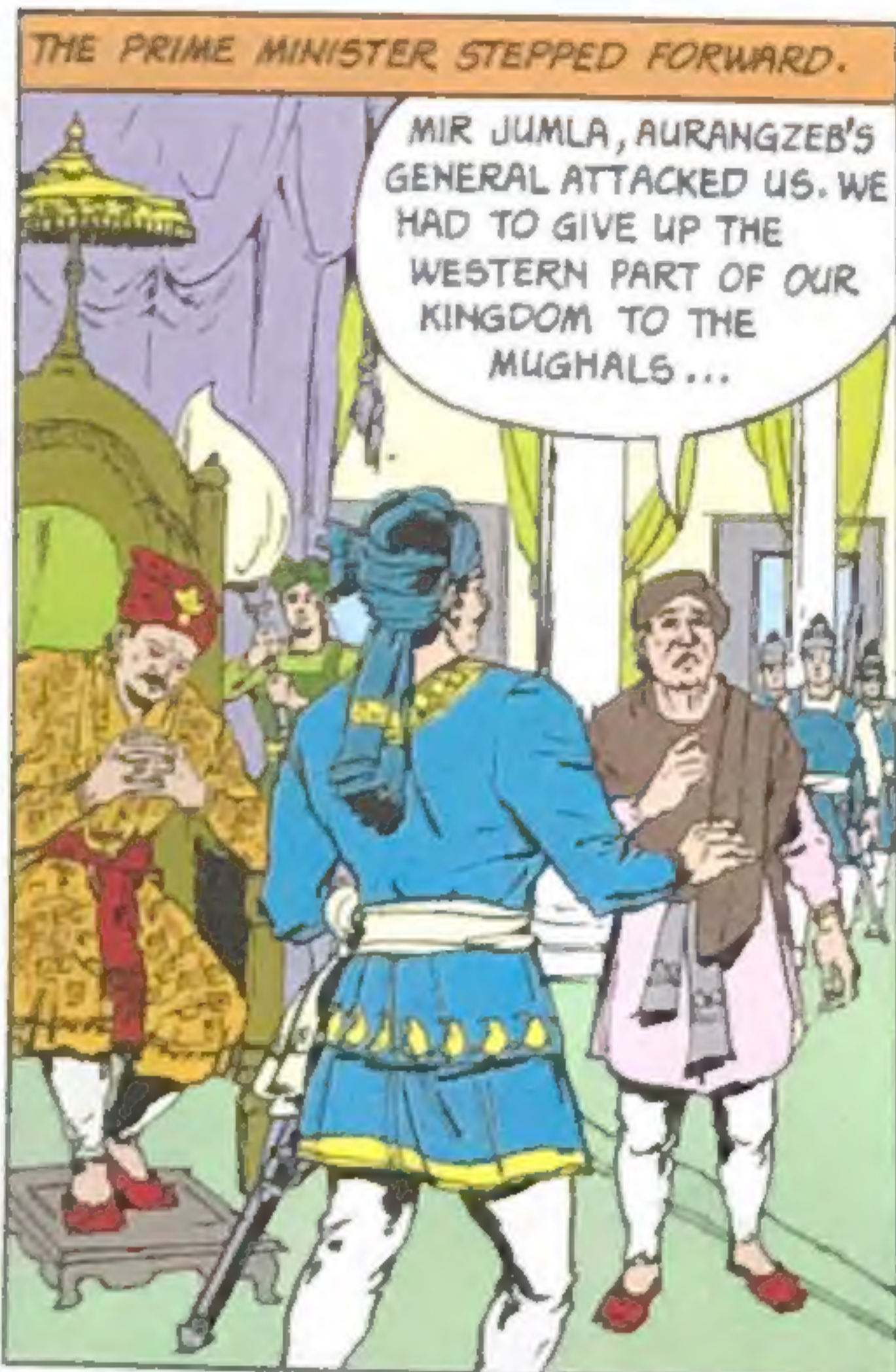
WHY AREN'T THEY CHEERING? WHY DO THEY LOOK SO GLUM? HAVEN'T THEY HEARD OF OUR EXPLOITS AT NARA?*



LACHIT CALLED ON HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, KING JAYADHWAJA SINGHA.

YOUR MAJESTY, THE RULER OF NARA IS NOW YOUR VASSAL. WE'VE COLLECTED TRIBUTES FROM HIM. AND YET THE CITY IS GLUM.





LACHIT SET OUT WITH HIS ARMY AND TRAVELLED DAY AND NIGHT WITHOUT REST.



WHEN HE REACHED THE OUTPOST AT KALIABAR —



THE PRINCESS WAS IN THE ADVANCE PARTY. BY NOW IT MUST HAVE REACHED DACC*

THEN I AM LATE. BUT I'LL STILL GET MIR JUMLA.

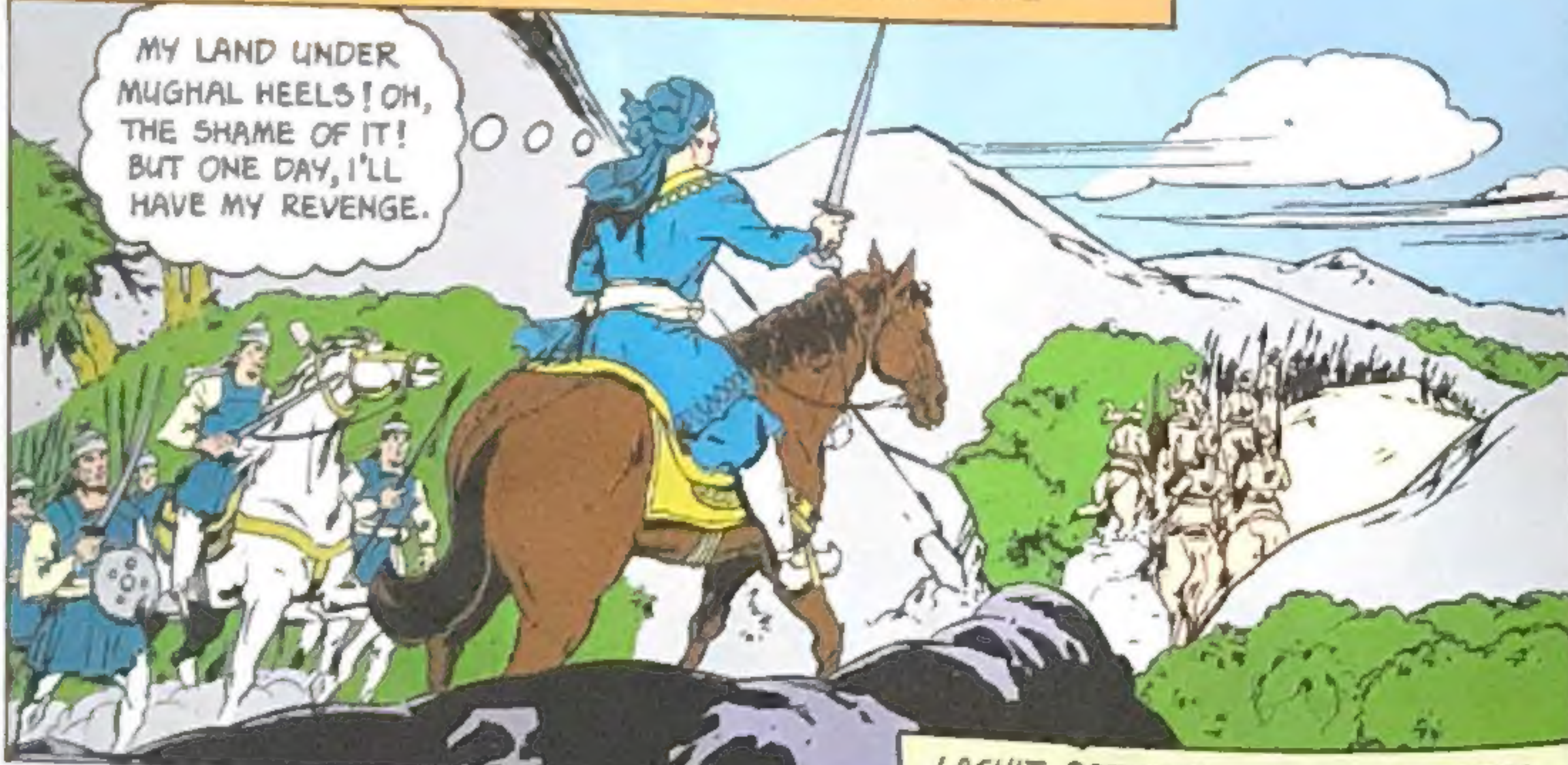


YOU CANNOT, SIR. HE'S DEAD. HIS MEN ARE CARRYING HIS BODY HOME.

THE PRINCESS IS GONE AND MIR JUMLA IS DEAD. I AM LEFT WITH ONLY THE HUMILIATION.



AS LACHIT SAW THE MUGHAL ARMY WENDING ITS WAY HOME —



MY LAND UNDER MUGHAL HEELS! OH, THE SHAME OF IT! BUT ONE DAY, I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE.

LACHIT RETURNED TO THE CAPITAL.

JAYADHWAJA SINGHA TRIED TO PIECE TOGETHER HIS SHATTERED STATE. BUT THE STRAIN TOOK HIM TO HIS DEATHBED. HE TURNED TO CHAKRADHWAJA, HIS HEIR-APPARENT.

MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT THE MUGHALS STILL DICTATE TERMS TO US. MAY YOU SUCCEED IN GETTING RID OF THEM!



WE PROMISE TO WIPE OUT THE STAIN ON THE HONOUR OF OUR LAND, YOUR MAJESTY.

NOW I MAY DIE IN PEACE.



ONE DAY, AFTER CHAKRADHWAJA SINGHA ASCENDED THE THRONE, A MUGHAL ENVOY CALLED ON HIM.

THE EMPEROR IS PLEASED TO PRESENT THE KHELAT* TO HIS VASSAL. HE WANTS YOU TO DON THIS IN OUR PRESENCE.

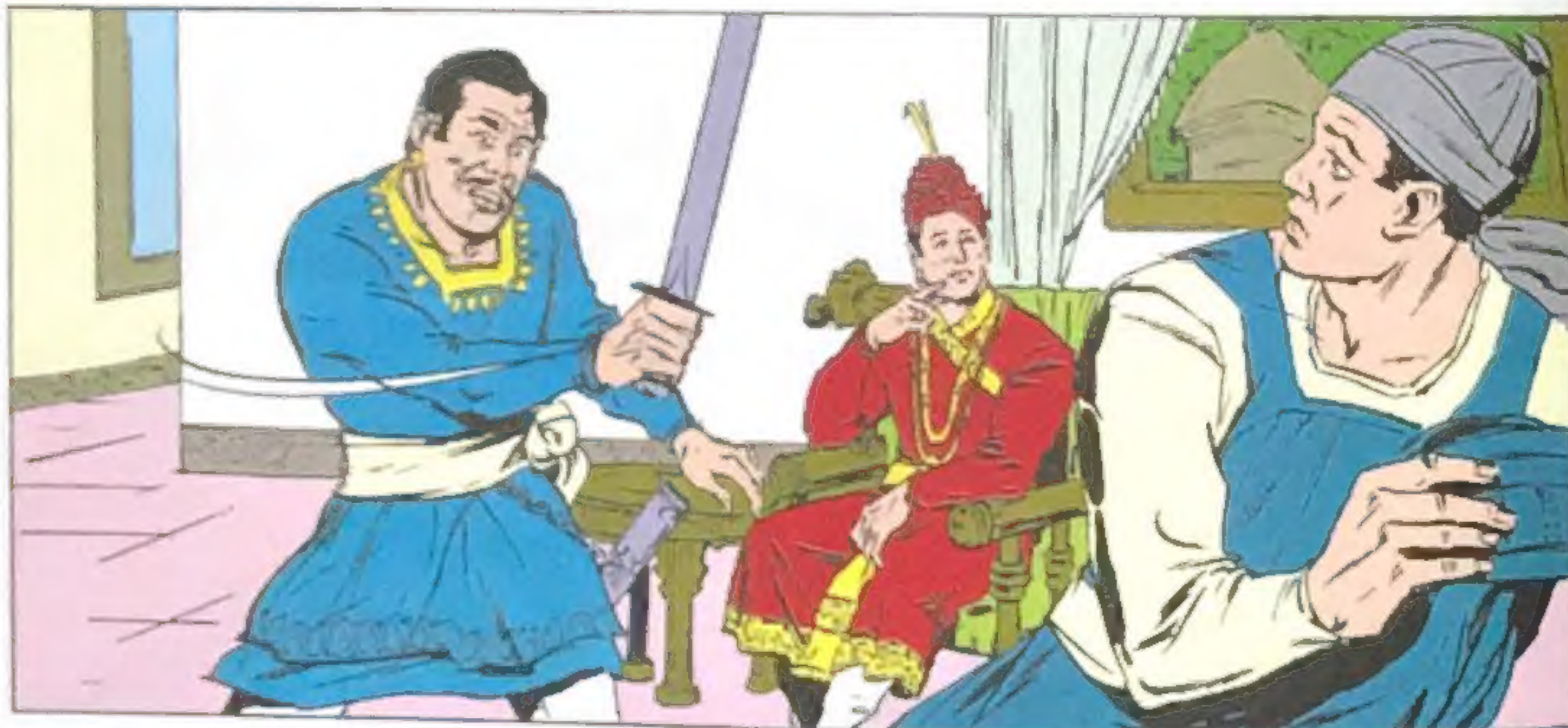
HOLD YOUR TONGUE!



* ROBE OF HONOUR



AS LACHIT KNELT BEFORE THE KING IN SALUTATION —



YOUR MAJESTY, PROTECT ME.

PRETENDING TO BE ANGRY, THE KING GOT UP.

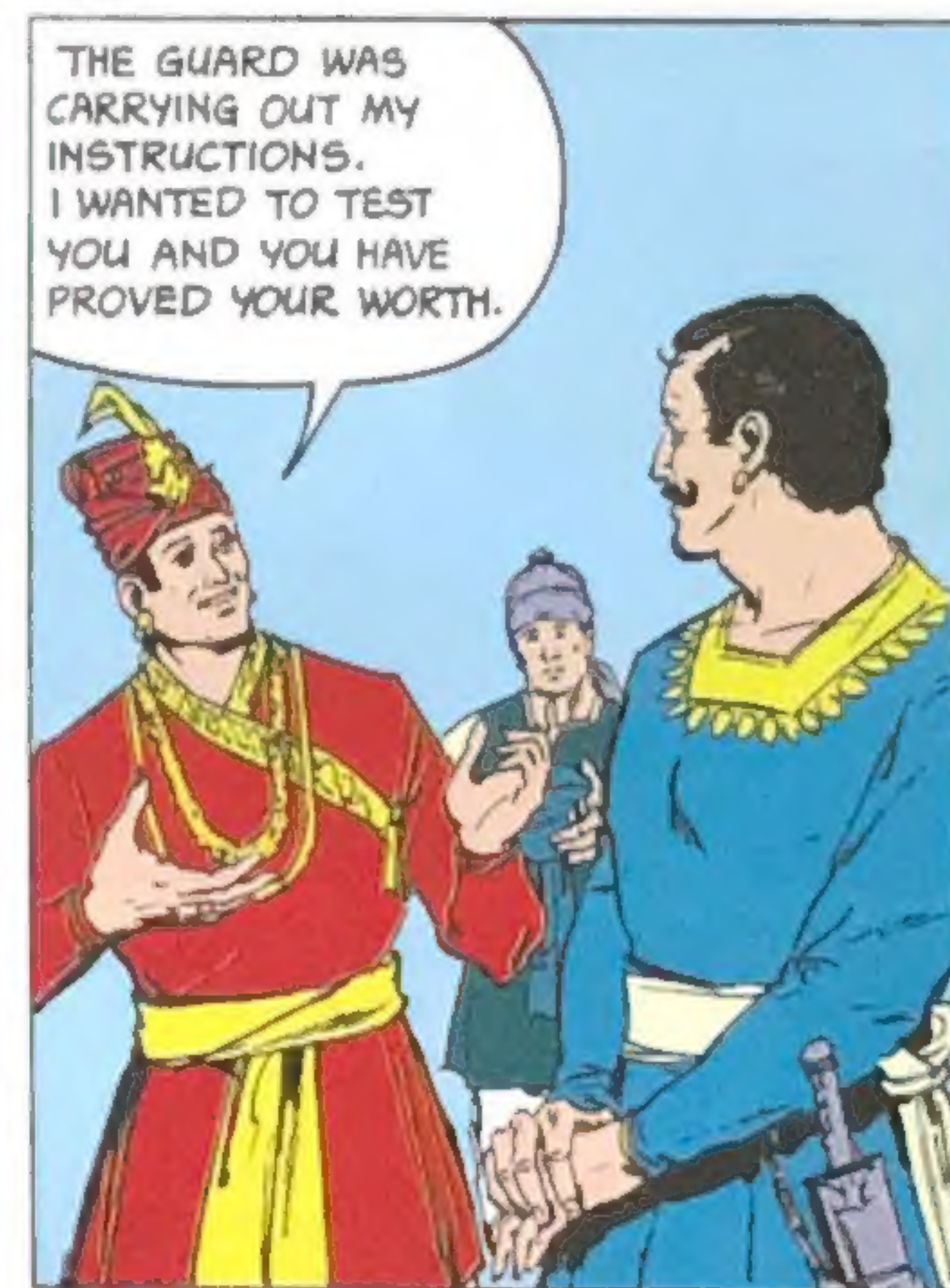


HOW DARE YOU DRAW YOUR SWORD IN OUR PRESENCE?

YOU SAW WHAT HE DID. NO WARRIOR WORTH HIS NAME WILL BROOK THIS INSULT. IT WAS A MATTER OF HONOUR, YOUR MAJESTY.



THE GUARD WAS CARRYING OUT MY INSTRUCTIONS. I WANTED TO TEST YOU AND YOU HAVE PROVED YOUR WORTH.



THEN THE KING HIMSELF PLACED THE TURBAN ON LACHIT'S HEAD.

TO LEAD OUR ARMY, WE NEED A WARRIOR WHO HOLDS HONOUR DEARER THAN HIS LIFE. WE THINK WE HAVE FOUND ONE TODAY.

I AM HONOURED, YOUR MAJESTY.



THE NEXT DAY, THE KING INVESTED LACHIT WITH THE TITLE BARPHUKAN*.

MAY YOU BRING GLORY TO OUR PEOPLE.

I PROMISE, YOUR MAJESTY, I'LL DRIVE OUT THE MUGHALS FROM OUR LAND.



* COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL ARMY

THE TIME HAD COME. THE AHOM ARMY SAILED DOWN THE RIVER BRAHMAPUTRA...



...AND ENTERED SARAIGHAT.

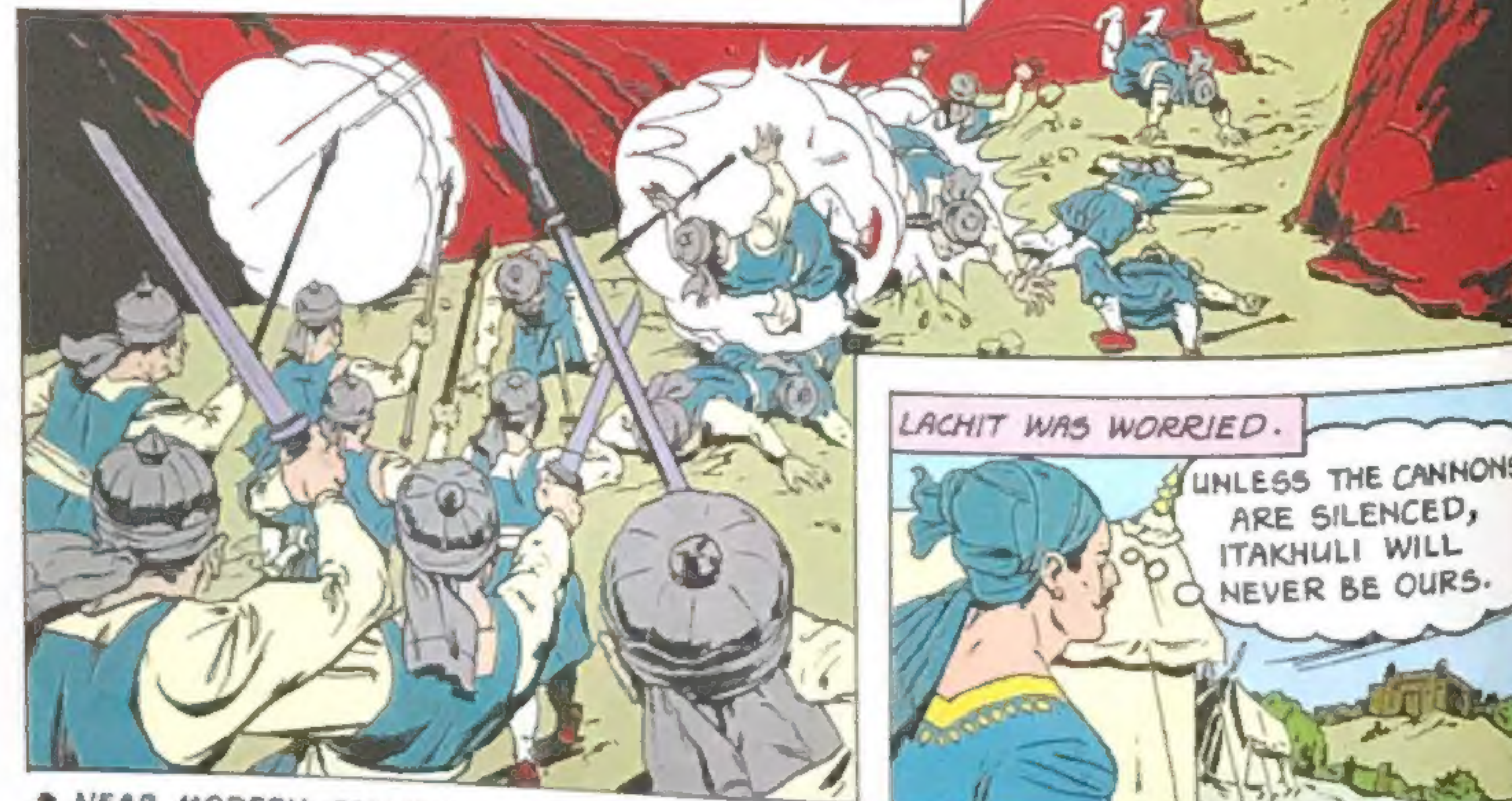
AT FORT ITAKHULI * A SPY STOOD BEFORE THE MUGHAL FAUZDAR, SYED FIROZ KHAN.



YOUR HIGHNESS, MANY OF OUR FORTS HAVE FALLEN. THE ASSAMESE WILL BE HERE ANY DAY NOW.

WE WILL GIVE THEM A BIG RECEPTION.

THE MUGHALS GREETED LACHIT AND HIS MEN WITH CANNONADE.



LACHIT WAS WORRIED.

UNLESS THE CANNONS ARE SILENCED, ITAKHULI WILL NEVER BE OURS.

* NEAR MODERN GAUHATI

LACHIT HAD A PLAN. HE SENT TWO GROUPS OF SPIES TO ITAKHULI AT NIGHT.

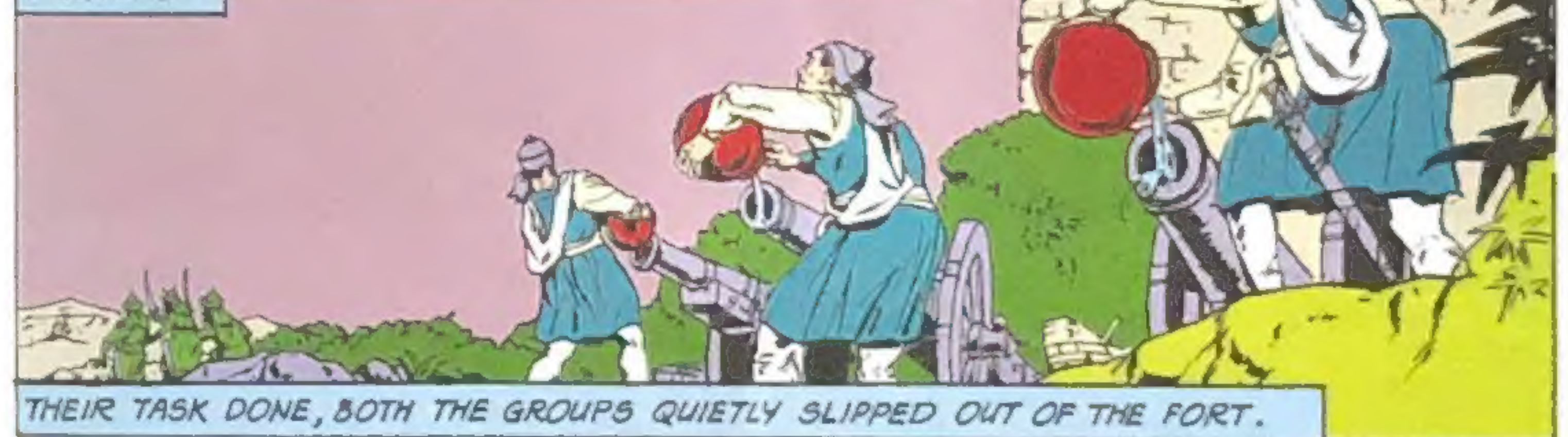


DID YOU HEAR A SOUND?

COME, LET'S FIND OUT WHAT IT IS.

WHILE ONE GROUP DREW AWAY THE GUARDS...

...THE OTHER POURED WATER INTO THE MUZZLES OF THE CANNONS.

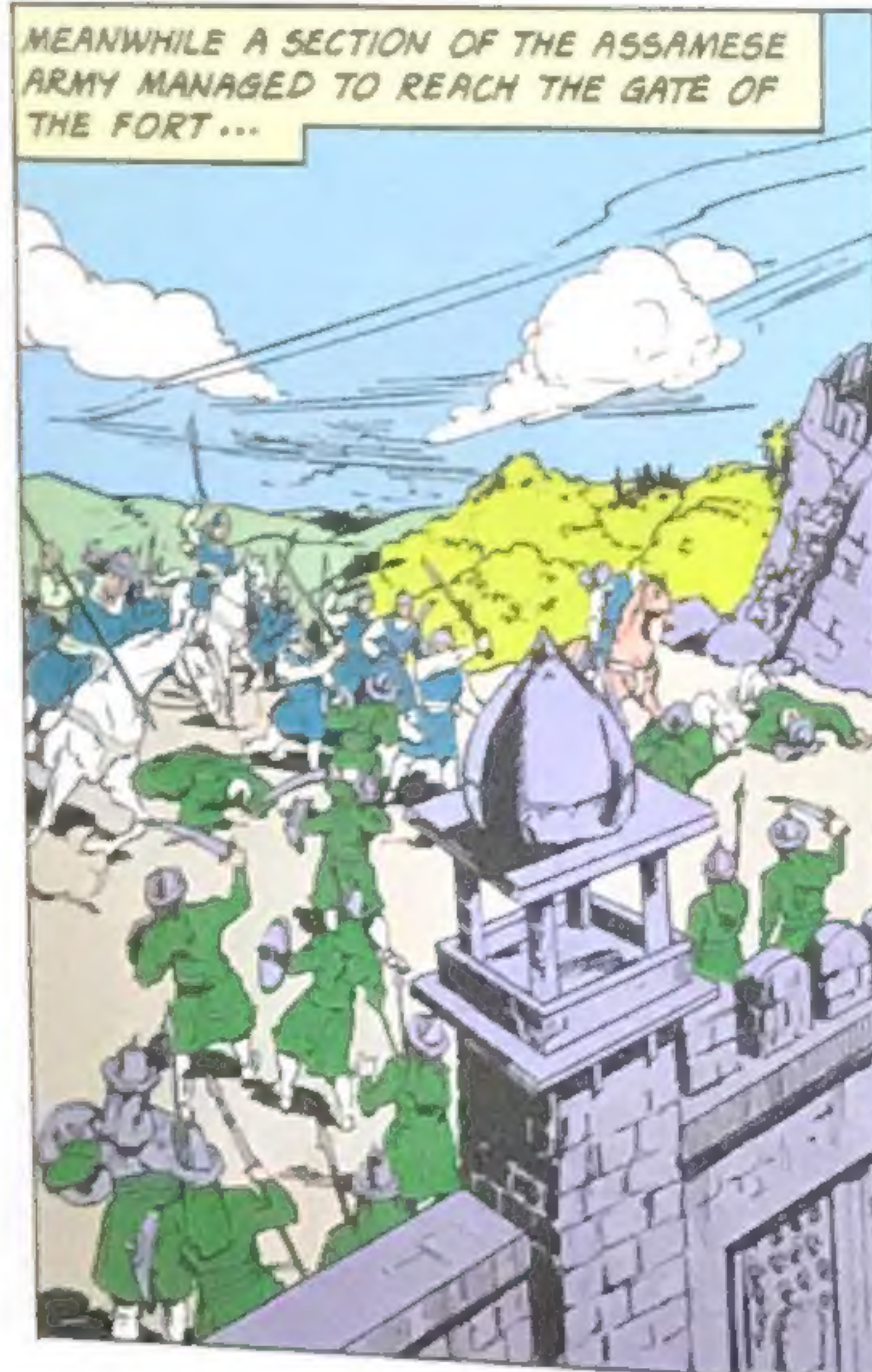


THEIR TASK DONE, BOTH THE GROUPS QUIETLY SLIPPED OUT OF THE FORT.

THE NEXT DAY —



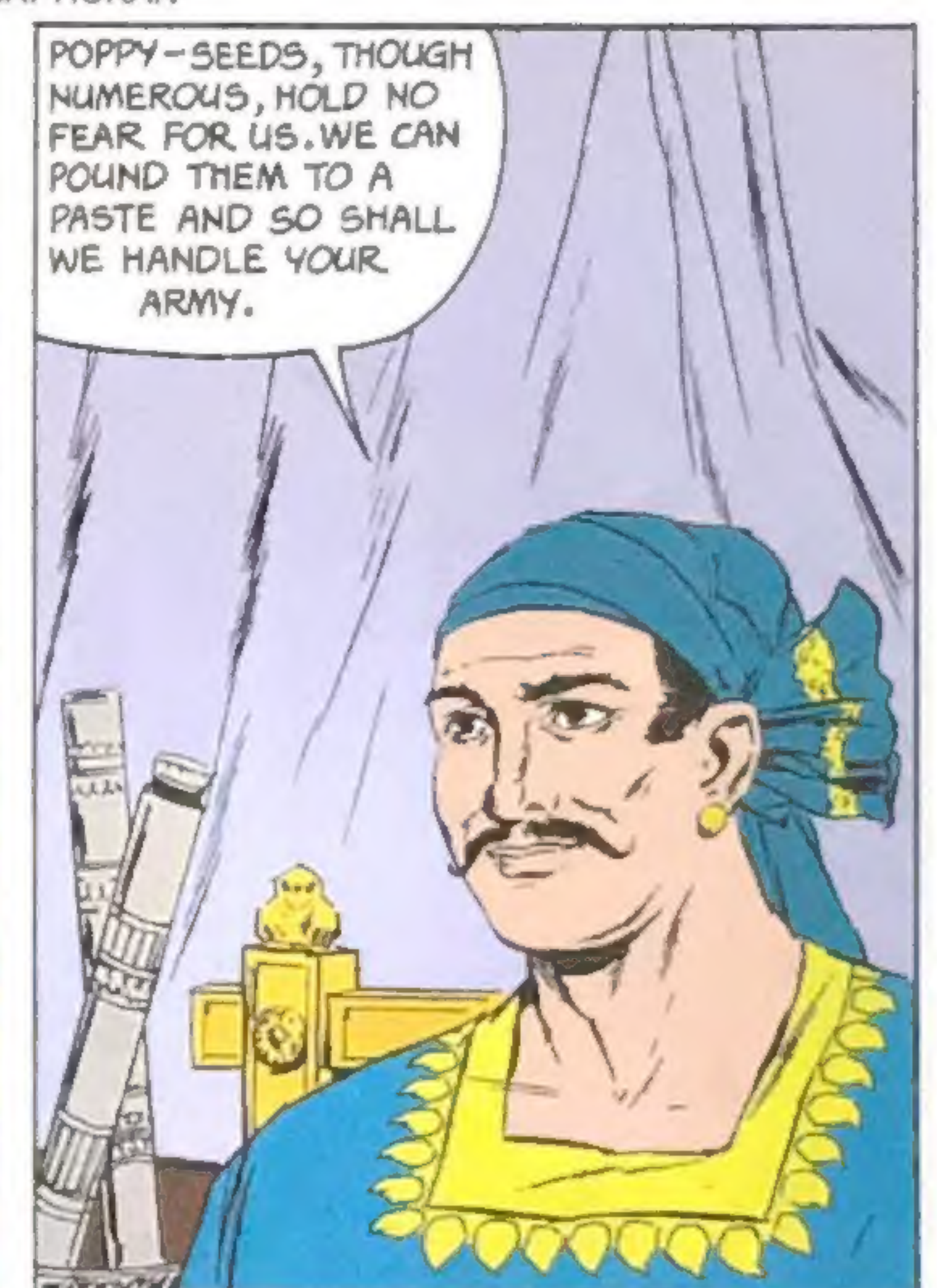
ONWARD! CHARGE! CLAMBER UP THE WALL WITHOUT FEAR.

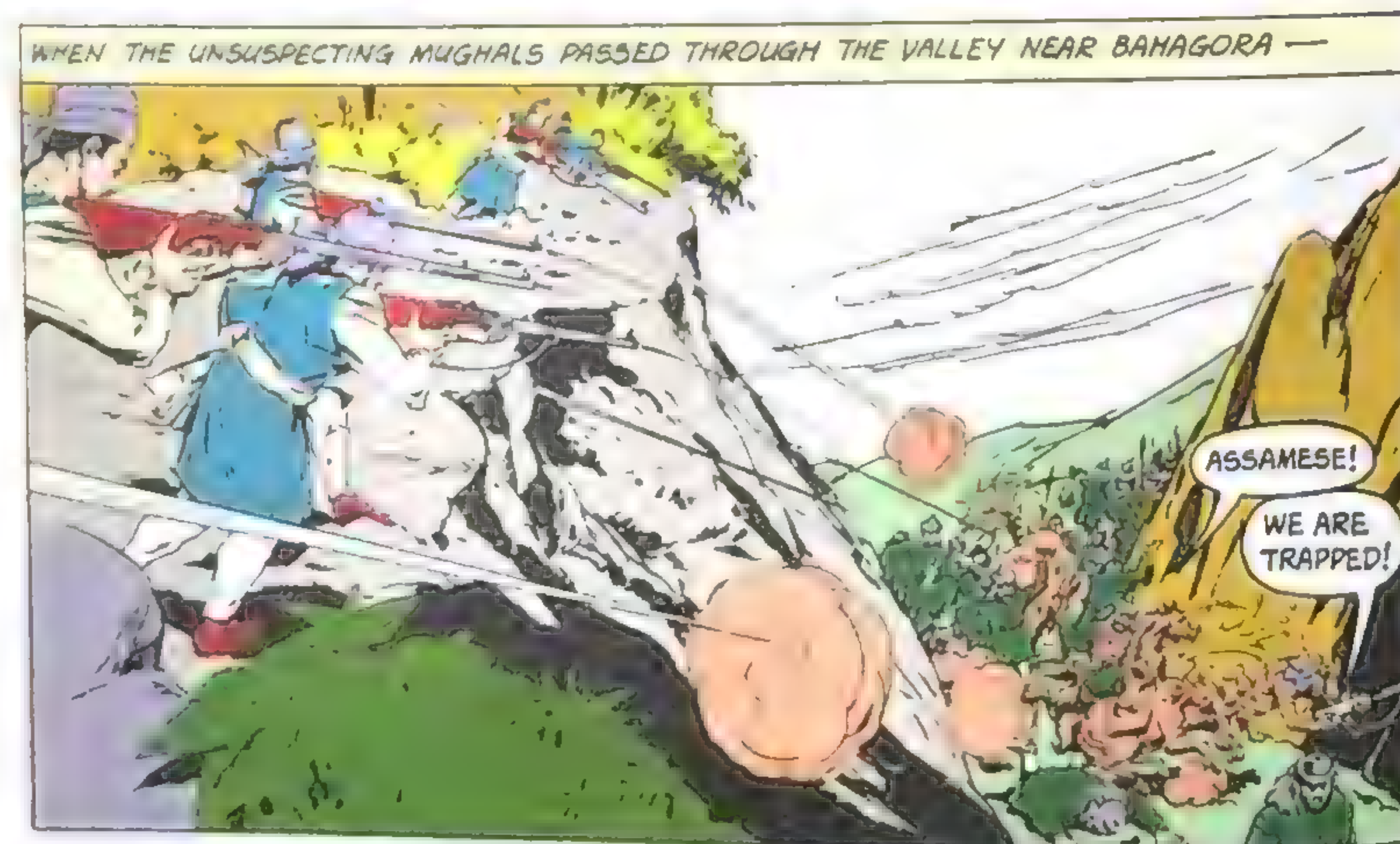
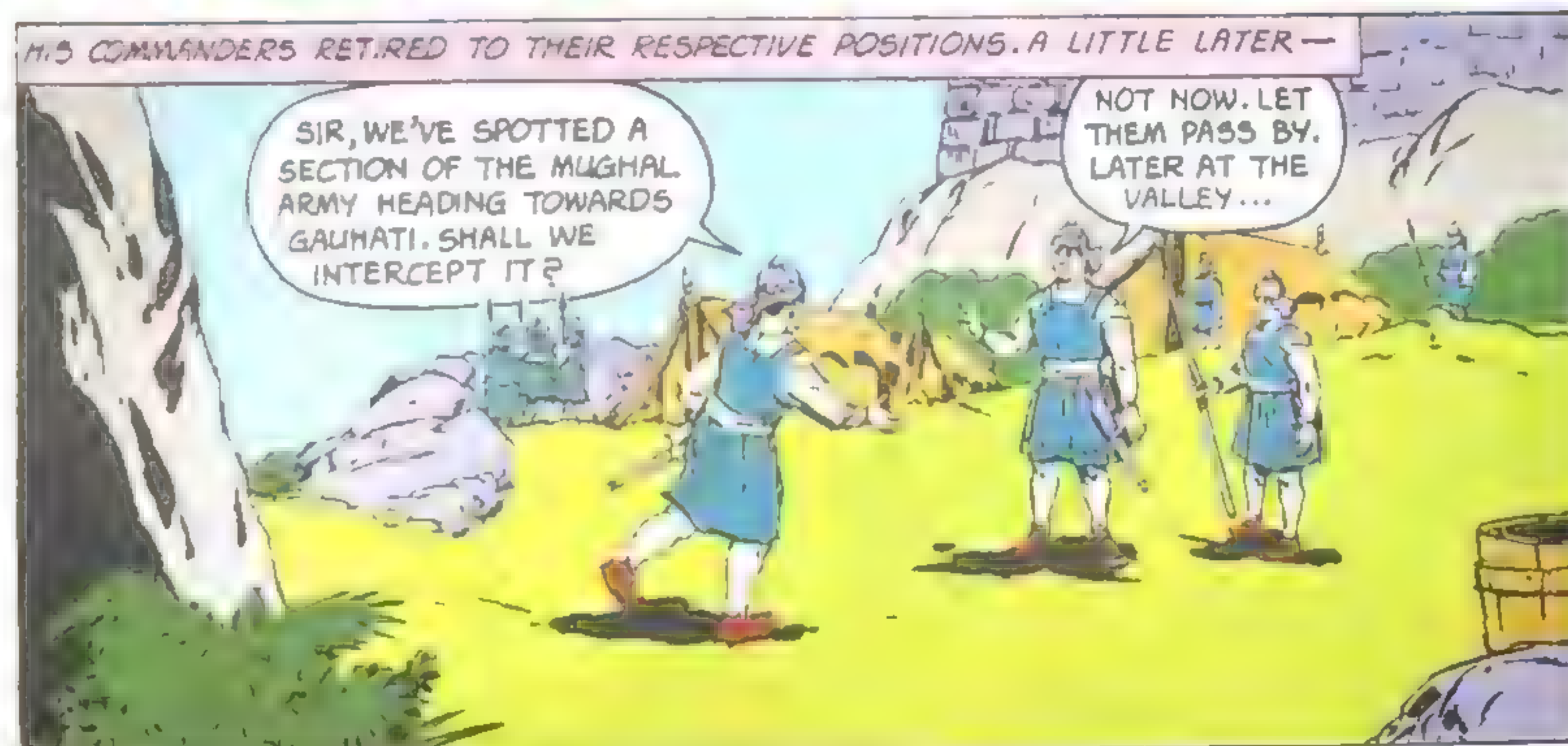
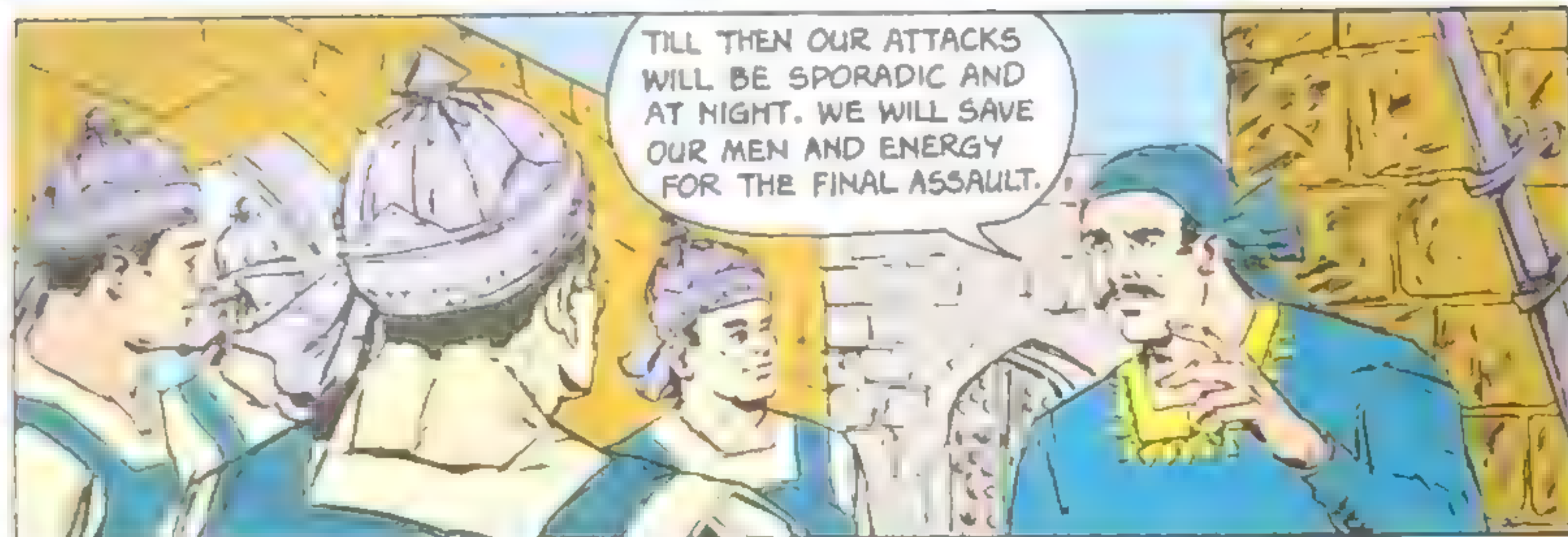






*NEAR GAUHATI







NOW I KNOW WHY THAT TRAITOR IS HOLDING HIMSELF BACK. HE HAS BEEN BOUGHT.



YOUR MAJESTY, IF LACHIT IS A TRAITOR THEN THERE ARE NO PATRIOTS IN OUR COUNTRY. THIS IS A RUSE OF THE MUGHALS. LET US NOT BELIEVE IT.



YES. LACHIT IS LOYAL. BUT WHY DOESN'T HE ATTACK? I'LL PROVOKE HIM TO FIGHT THE MUGHALS.



THE KING DESPATCHED A MESSENGER TO LACHIT.

YOUR HIGHNESS, THE MAHARAJA COMMANDS YOU TO ATTACK THE MUGHALS IMMEDIATELY...



...OR ELSE TO WEAR THESE WOMEN'S CLOTHES.

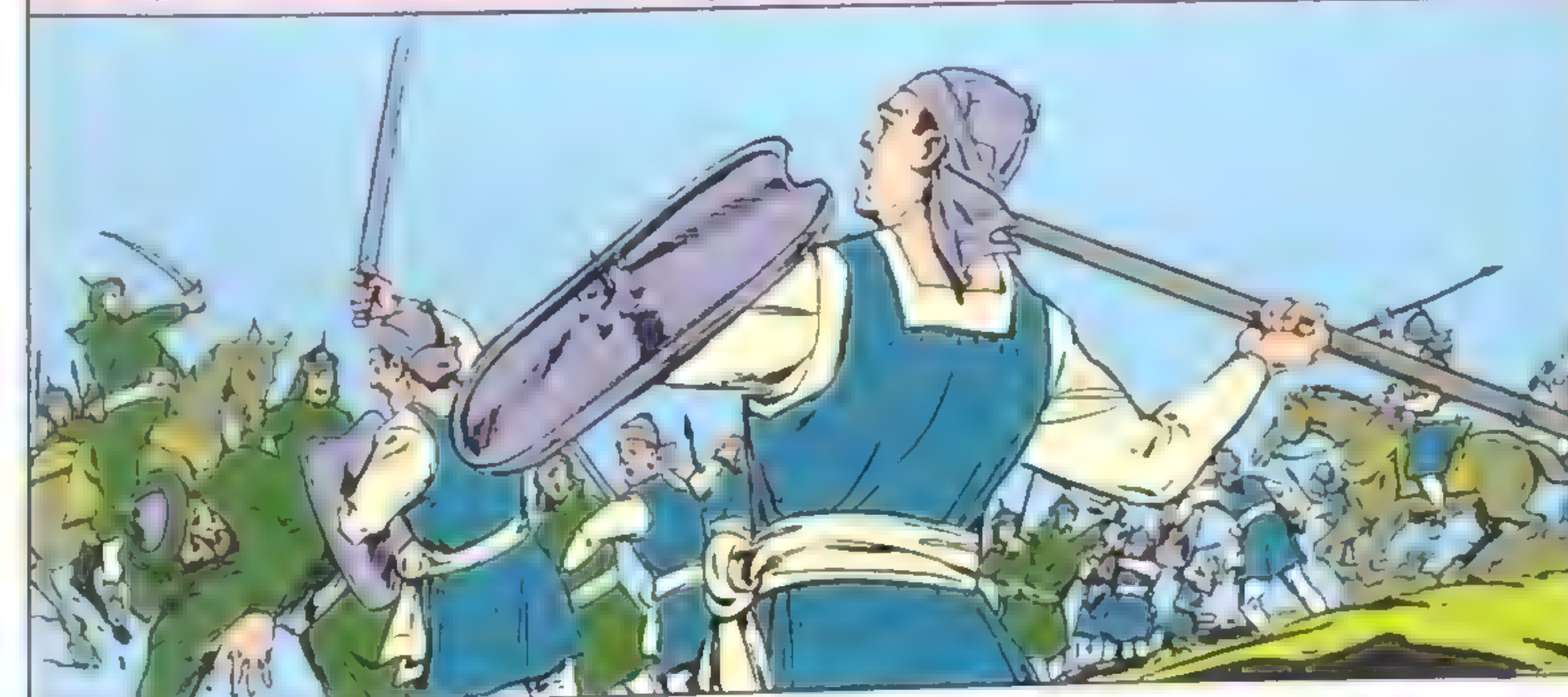
WHAT DOES THE KING MEAN BY THIS! WHY DOES HE WANT TO GOAD ME TO ACTION?



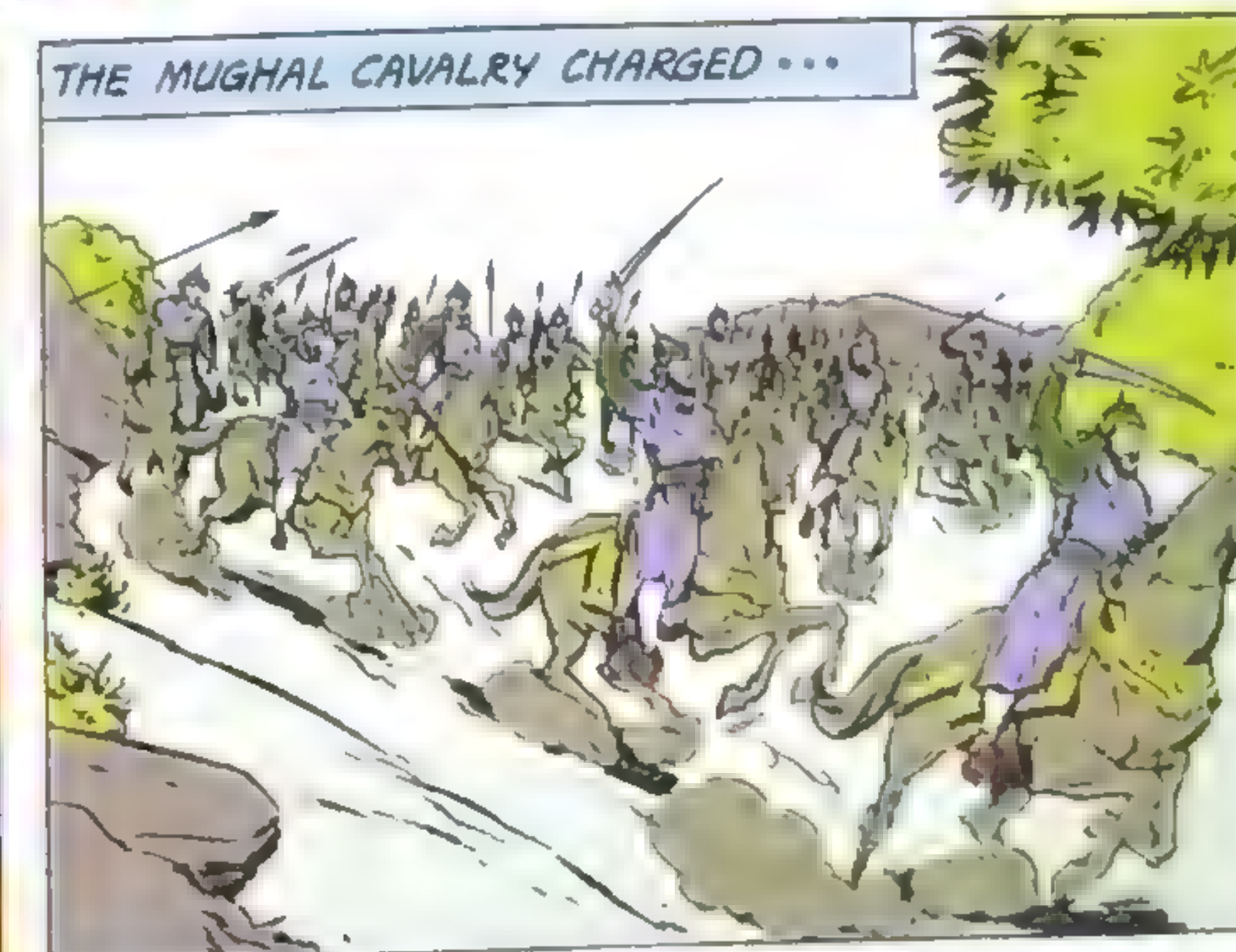
THUS LACHIT WAS COMPELLED TO ATTACK THE MUGHAL FORCES. THE TWO ARMIES MET ON THE PLAINS TO THE SOUTH OF ALABOI HILL.

AT LAST LACHIT HAS COME OUT INTO THE OPEN. THIS IS MY CHANCE.

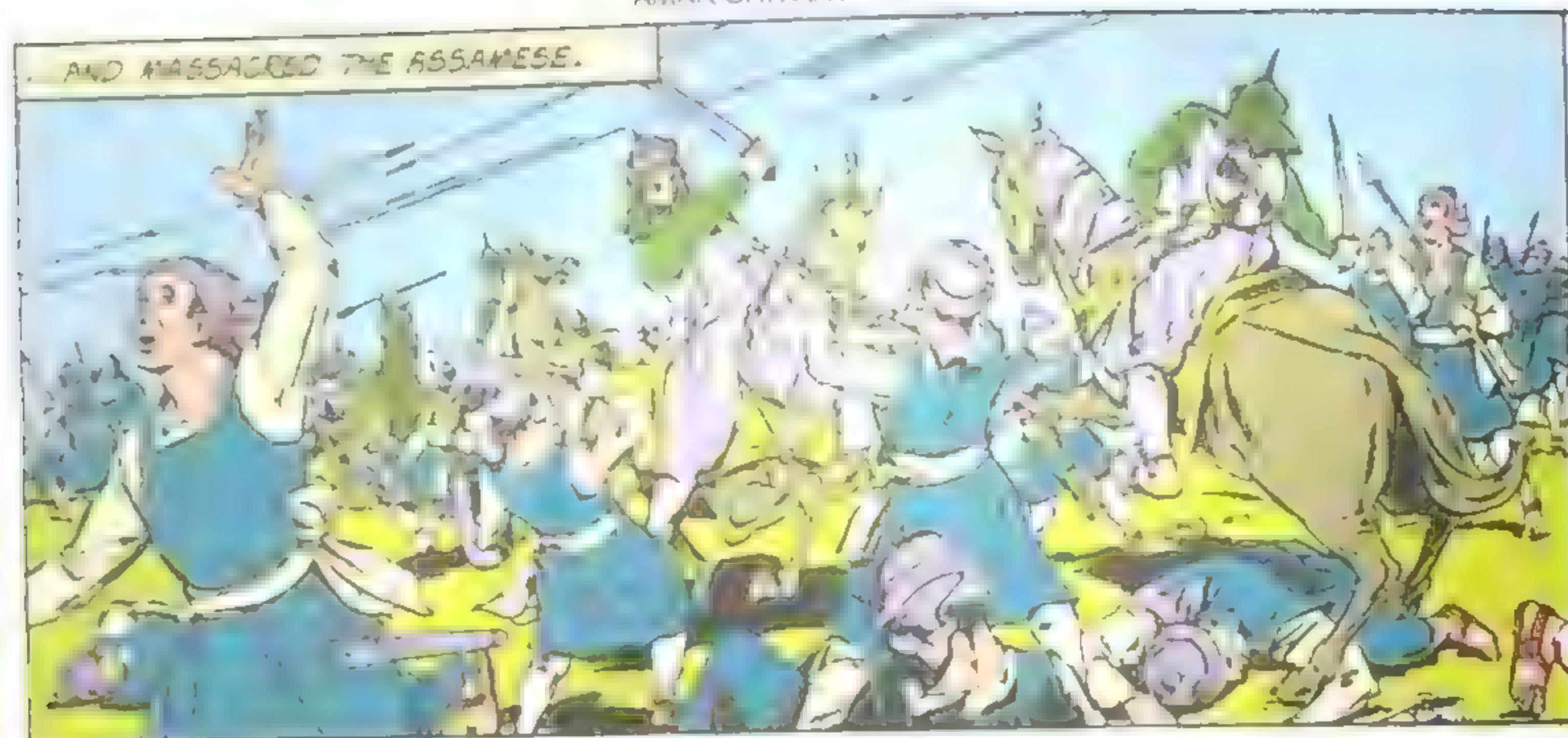
IN THE FIERCE BATTLE THAT FOLLOWED, THE ASSAMESE PROVED THEMSELVES SUPERIOR.



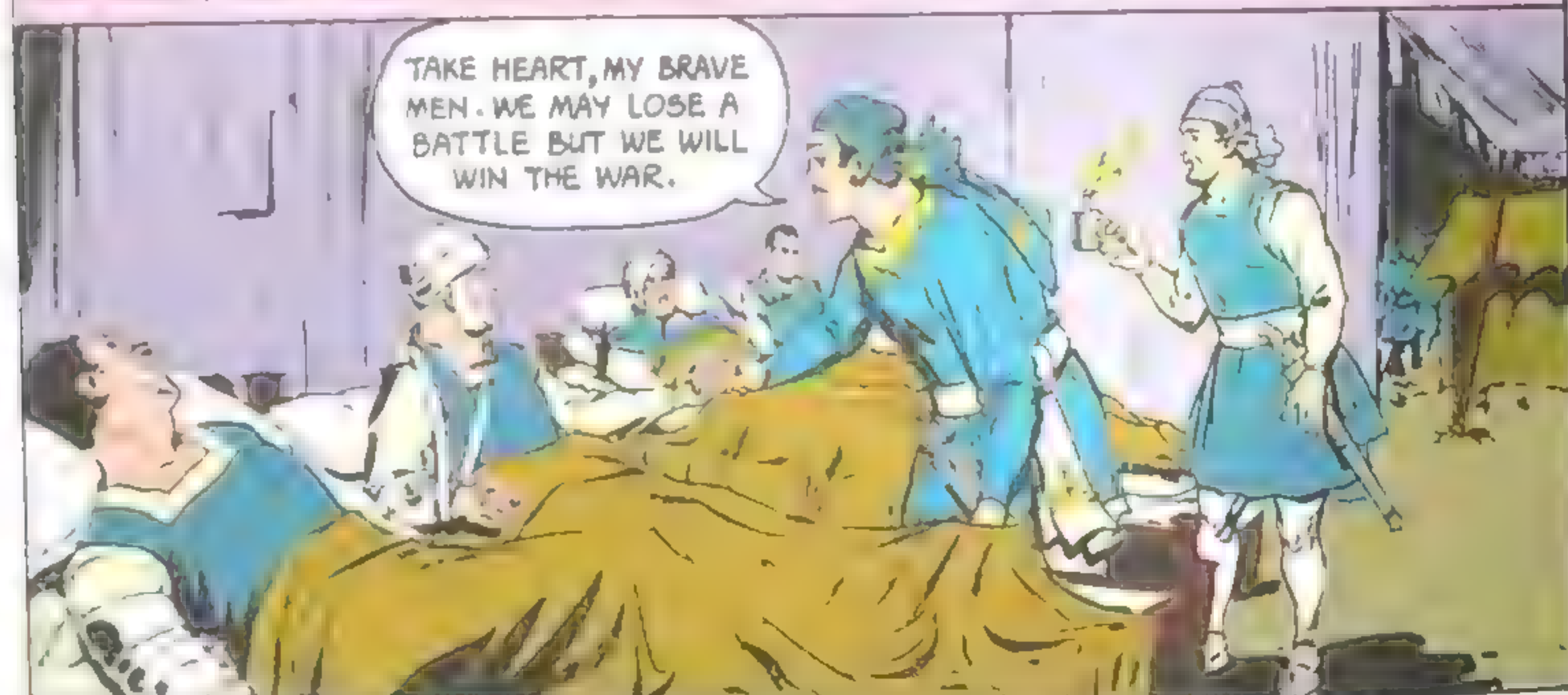
I'D BETTER CALL MY CAVALRY TO ASSIST.



THE MUGHAL CAVALRY CHARGED...



THAT NIGHT, LACHIT WENT ROUND THE CAMP AND CONSOLED THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS.



LACHIT HAD HARDLY RAISED THE MORALE OF HIS MEN WHEN A MESSENGER ARRIVED FROM THE CAPITAL.



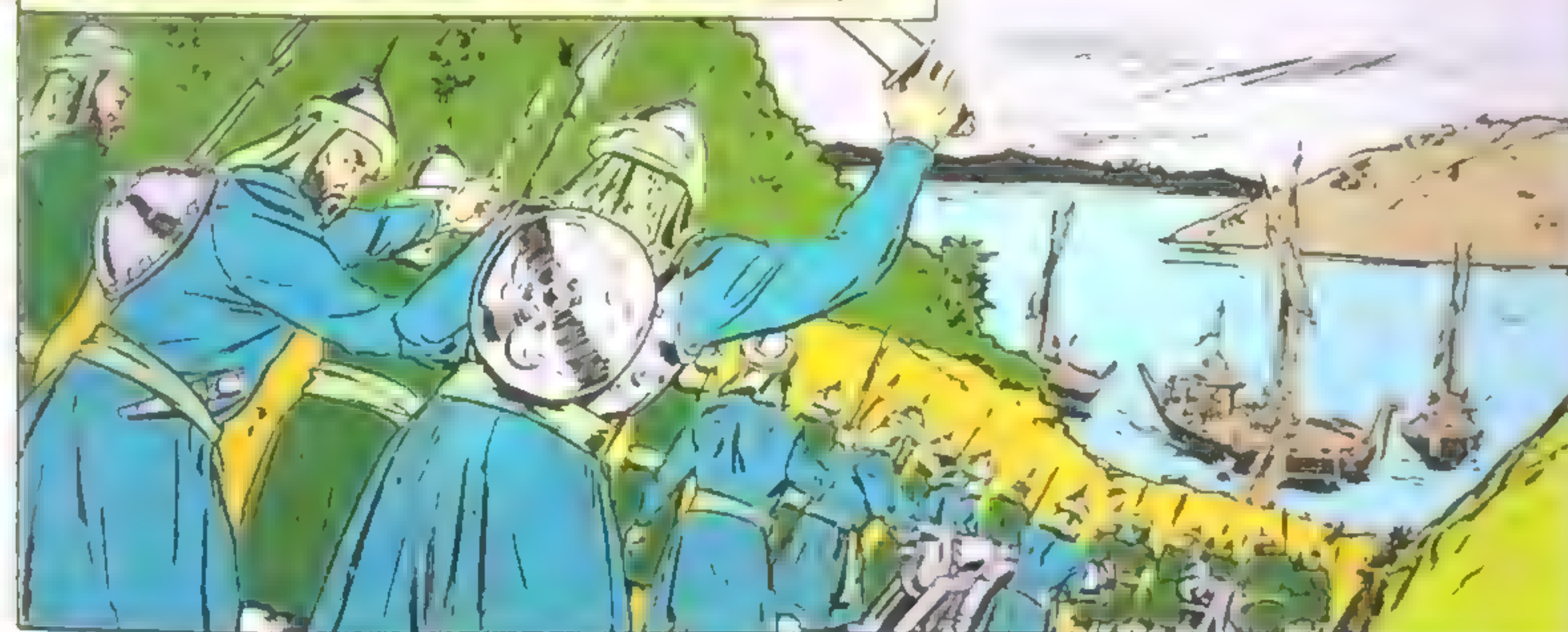
I HAVE NOT YET FULFILLED THE PROMISE MADE TO THE KING. I'VE FAILED... FAILED...



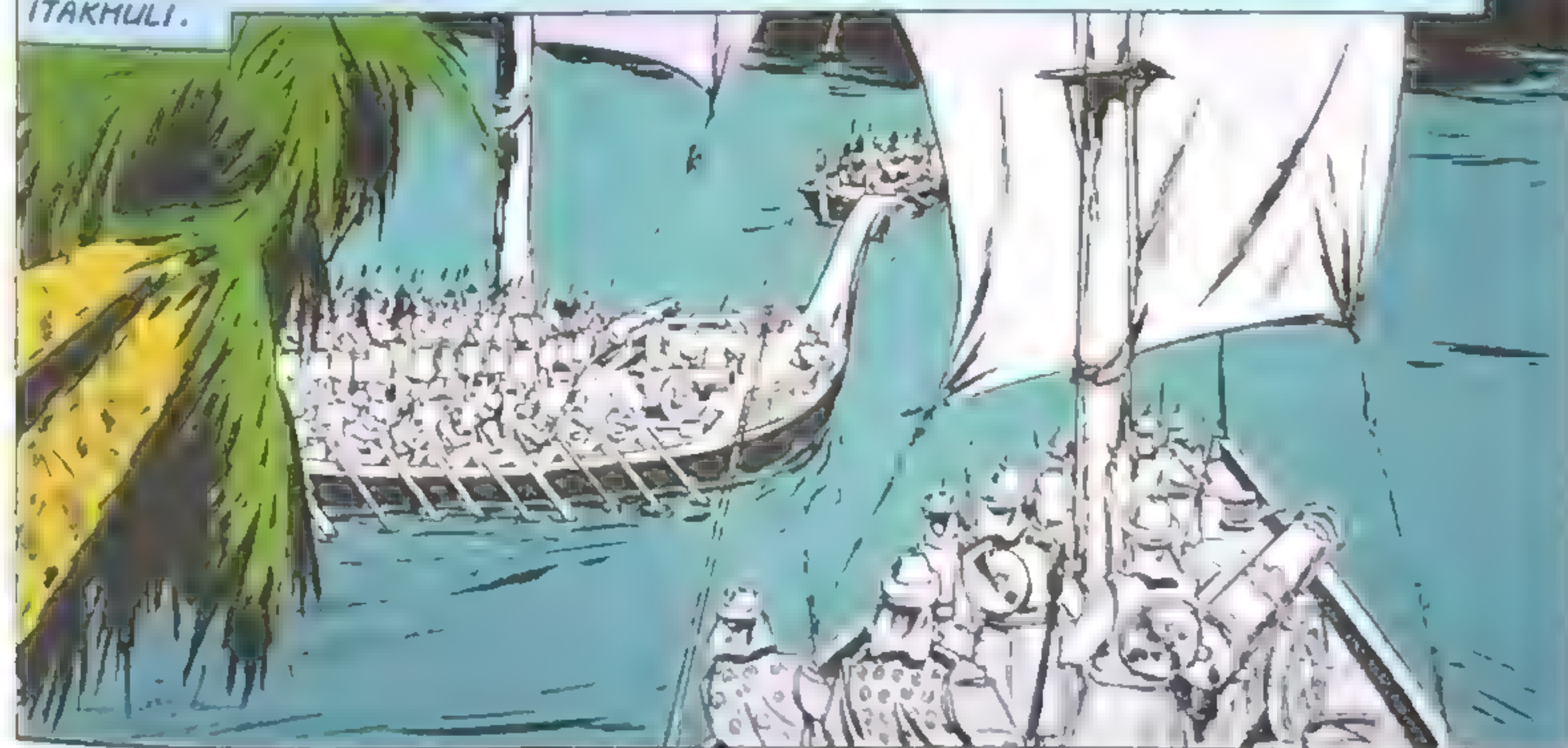
LACHIT FELL SERIOUSLY ILL. THIS CAUSED JUBILATION IN THE MUGHAL CAMP.



RAM SINGH MOVED HIS ARMY TO THE RIVER BANK ...

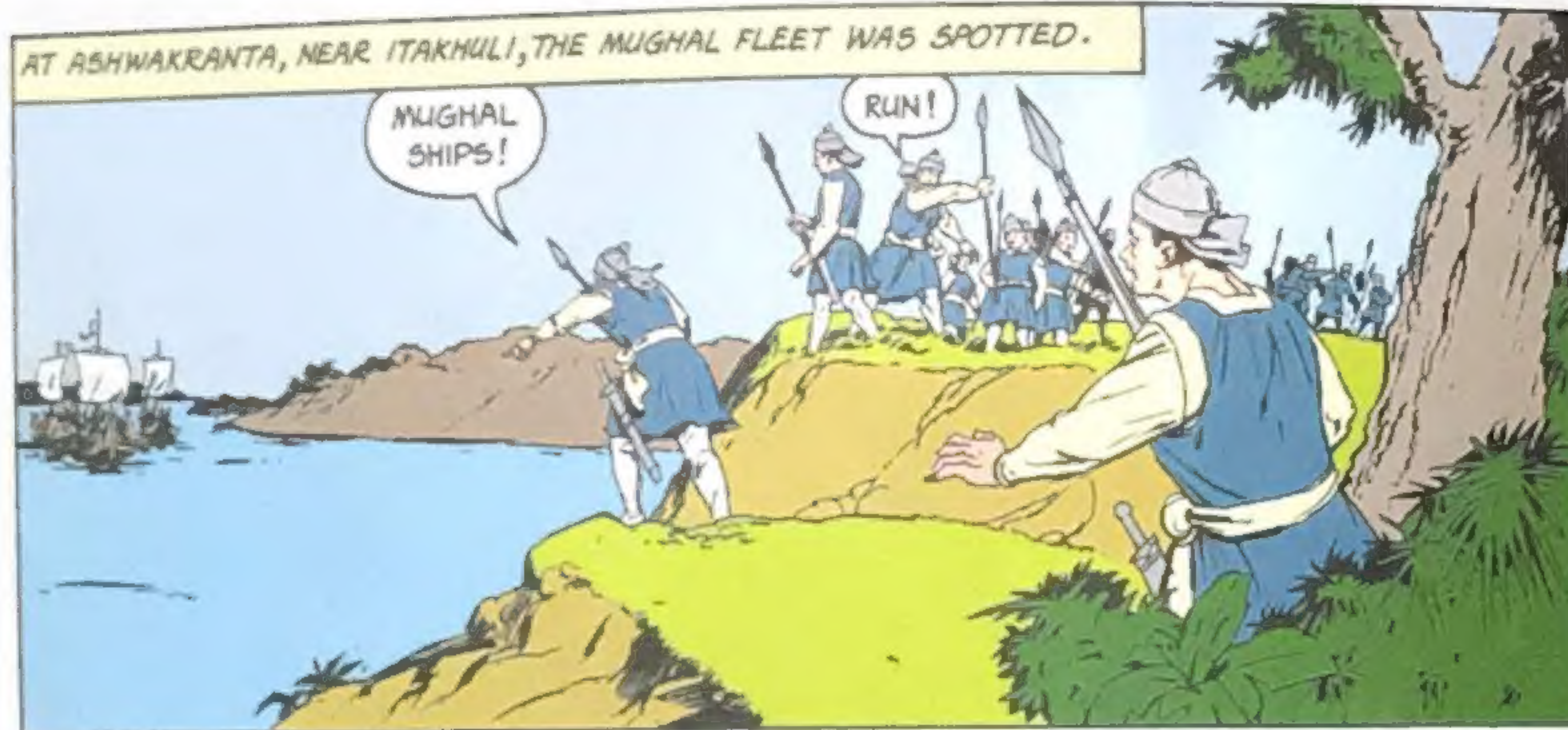


... AND UNDER COVER OF NIGHT, THE MUGHAL FLEET BEGAN TO SAIL TOWARDS ITAKHULI.

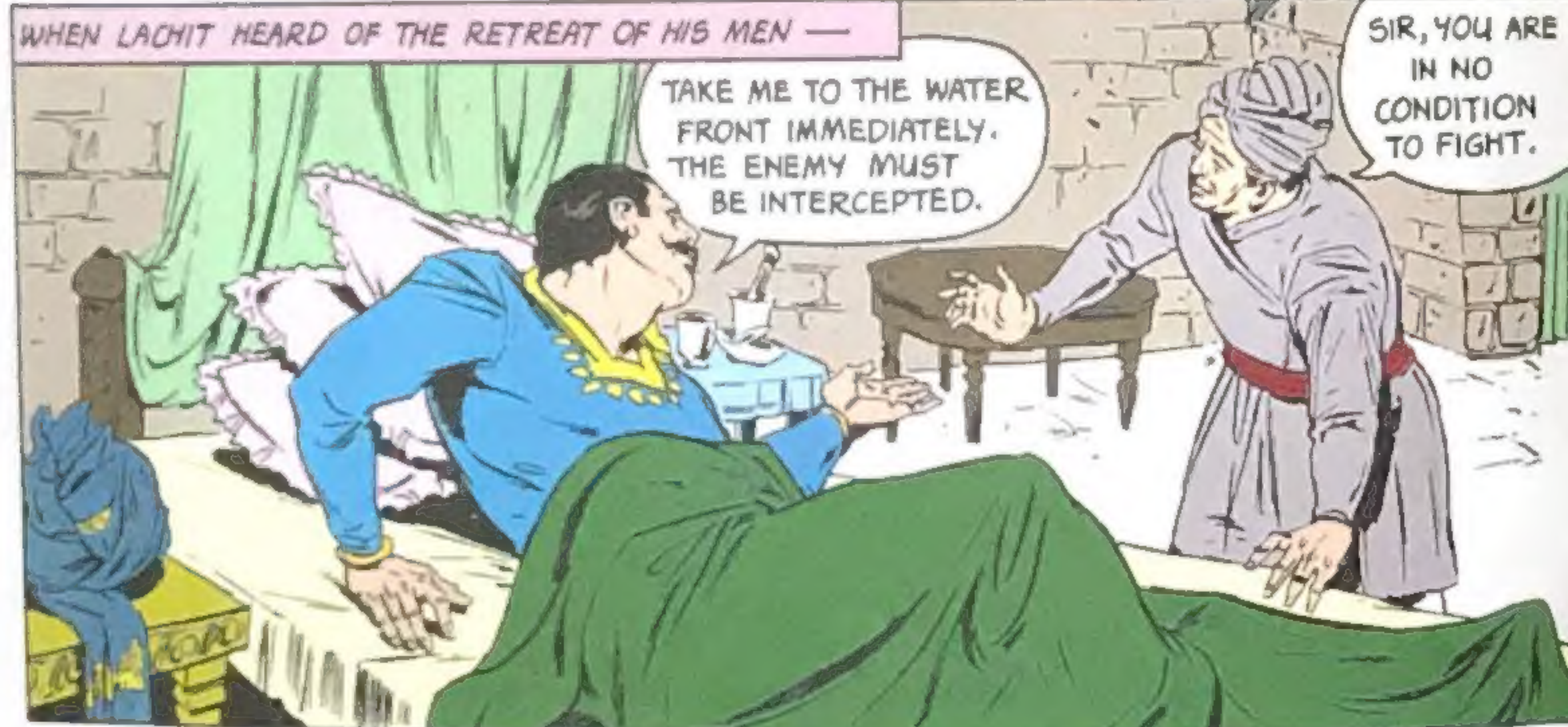


* UDAYADITYA SINGHA SUCCEEDED CHAKRADHWAJA SINGHA.

AT ASHWAKRANTA, NEAR ITAKHULI, THE MUGHAL FLEET WAS SPOTTED.



WHEN LACHIT HEARD OF THE RETREAT OF HIS MEN —



LACHIT WAS CARRIED TO THE GATE-HOUSE.



AS SOON AS HE REACHED THE GATE-HOUSE, HE WAS ABOUT TO ORDER AN ATTACK. BUT THE ROYAL ASTROLOGER STOPPED HIM.



THE MUGHAL BOATS WERE RAPIDLY ADVANCING.

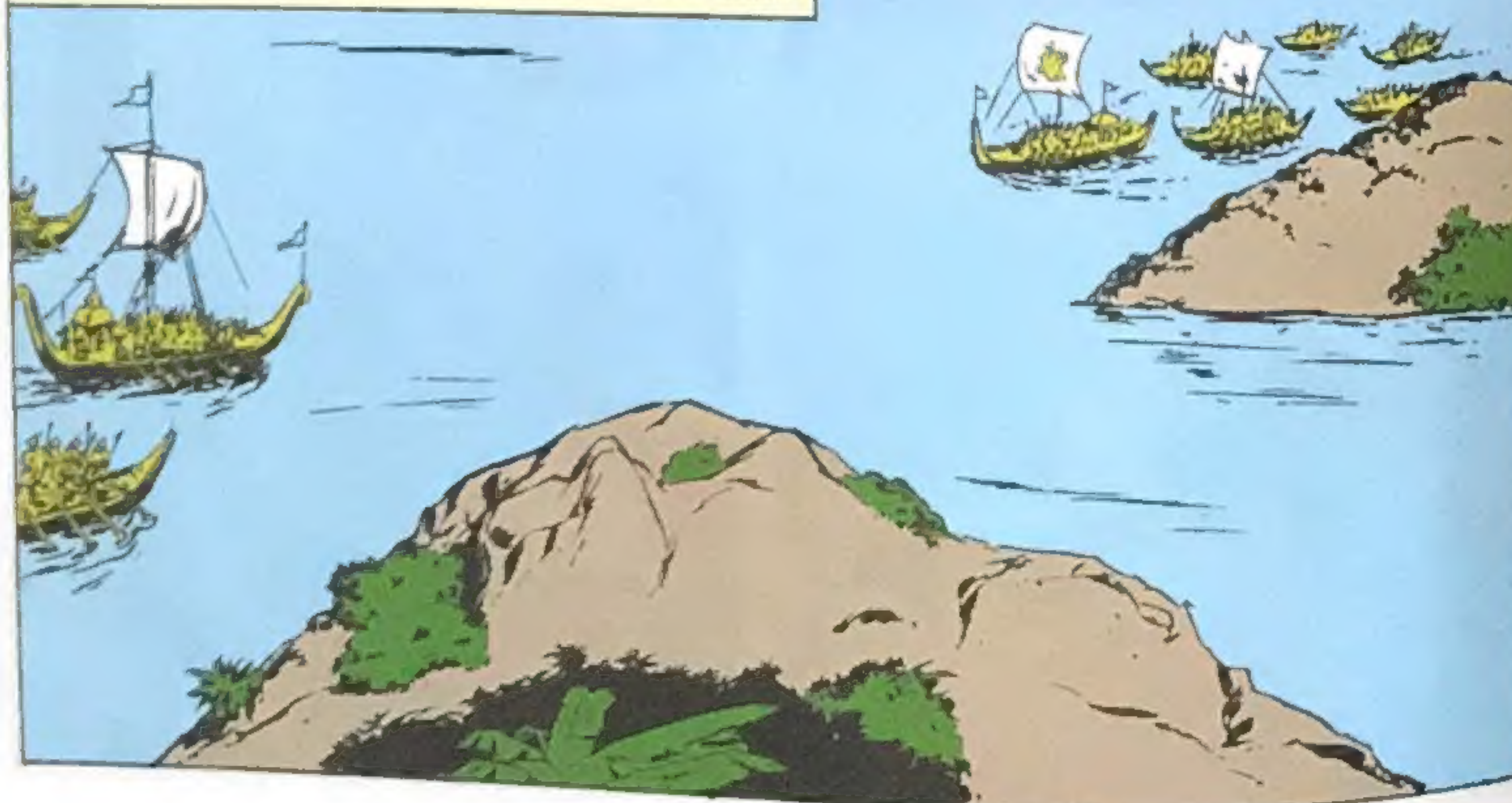
O ASTROLOGER, THE MUGHALS ARE CLOSING IN ON US. YOU'VE BROUGHT ABOUT MY DISGRACE.

NOW IS THE TIME! ATTACK NOW AND VICTORY WILL BE YOURS!

SUPPORTED BY HIS PERSONAL GUARDS, LACHIT CAME DOWN THE STEPS OF THE GATE-HOUSE...

...AND BOARDED HIS BOAT.

SIX OTHER ARMED BOATS ACCOMPANIED HIS BOAT.



THE BOAT BEGAN TO MOVE.

WHERE ARE WE HEADING? WHY ARE WE MOVING AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF ACTION?

THE HELMSMAN STEPPED FORWARD.

WE ARE SAILING UP THE RIVER TO SAVE YOUR LIFE.

MY LIFE!

HOW DARE YOU TURN MY BOAT AWAY FROM THE BATTLE SCENE!

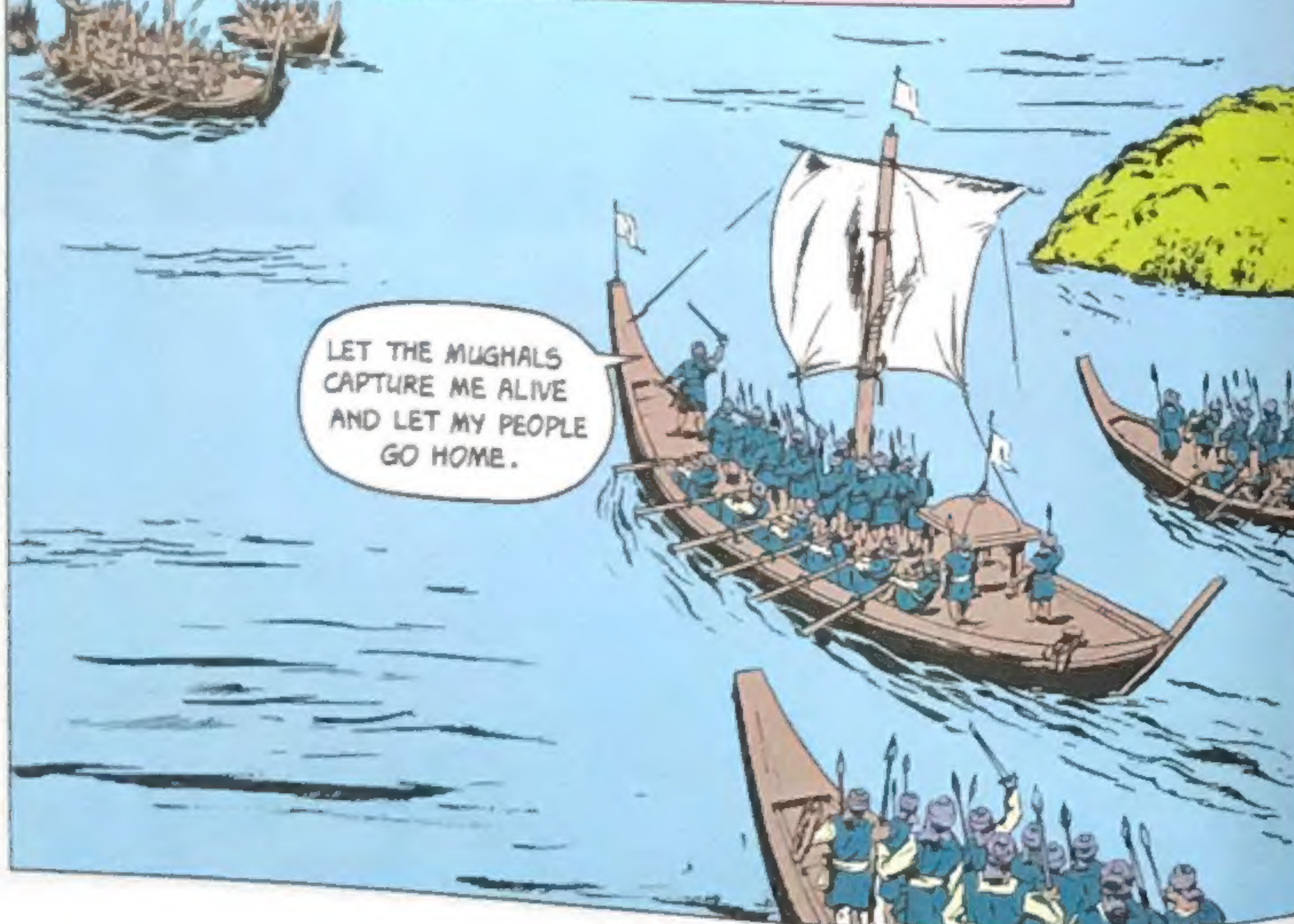
ILL AS HE WAS, LACHIT LIFTED THE MAN . . .



...AND THREW HIM INTO THE WATER.



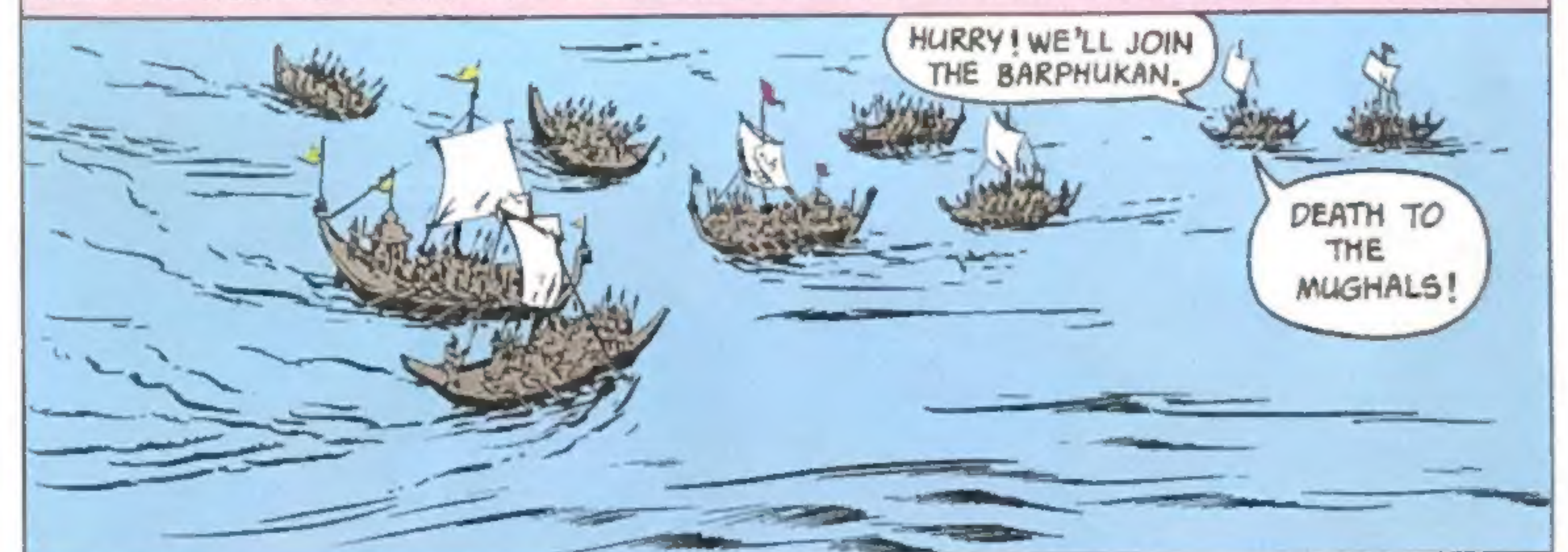
AS HIS BOAT SPED AHEAD, LACHIT RAISED HIS VOICE, LOUD AND CLEAR,



HIS WORDS HAD AN ELECTRIFYING EFFECT ON HIS MEN.



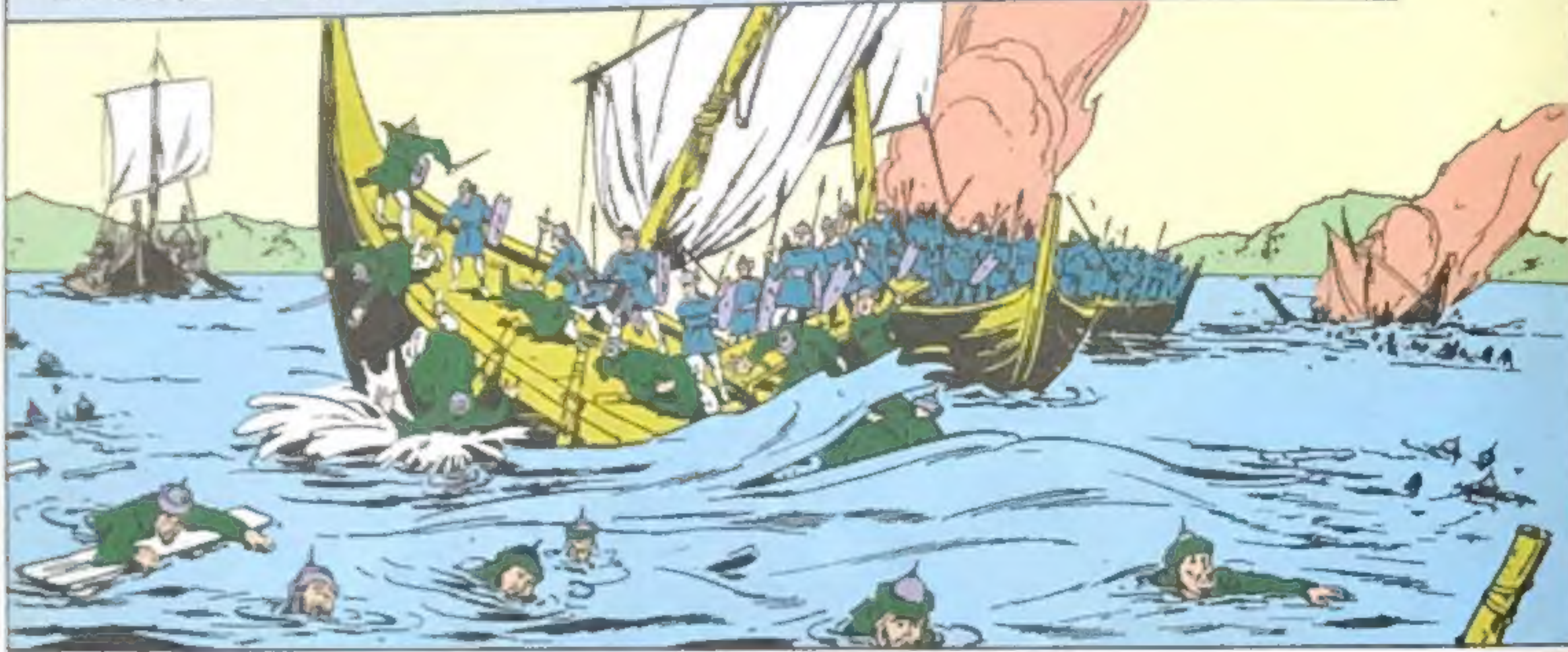
WHEN THE ASSAMESE SAW THE ENEMY STEERING THEIR BARGES TOWARDS LACHIT'S BOAT—



IN MINUTES, LACHIT HAD TRANSFORMED DESPAIR TO COURAGE. THE MUGHALS COULD NOT STAND THE DASH AND FURY OF THE ASSAMESE ATTACK.



THE MUGHAL BOATS WERE SUNK AND MANY SOLDIERS FELL INTO THE RIVER.



RAM SINGH TURNED PALE.

A NAVAL BATTLE WITH THE ASSAMESE IS SUICIDAL. RETREAT.



AS THE MUGHALS TURNED TAIL —

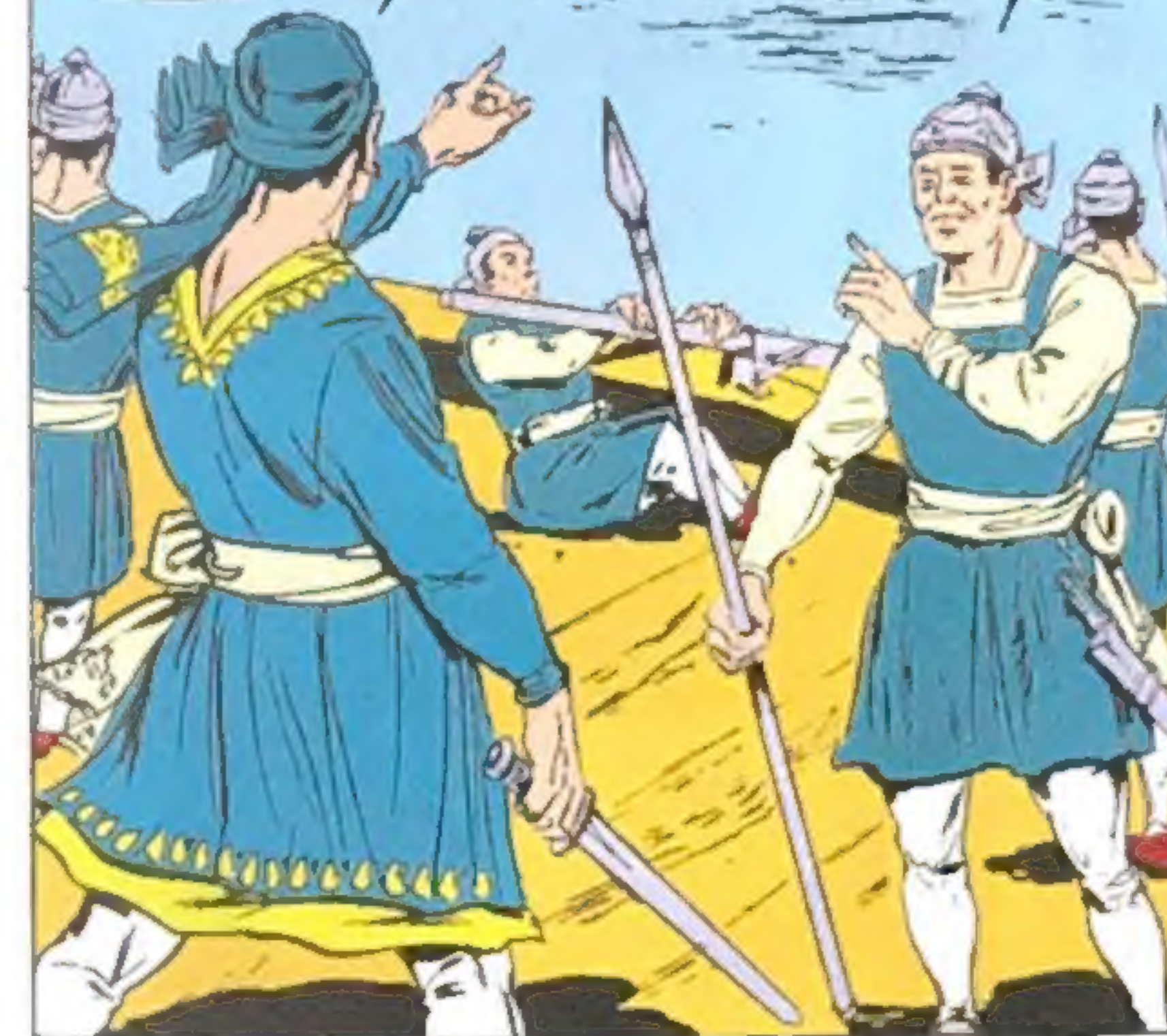
VICTORY TO LACHIT BARPHUKAN!



EVEN IN THE GREAT MOMENT OF VICTORY, LACHIT WAS NOT COMPLACENT.

PURSUE THE ENEMY AT A DISTANCE AND SEE THAT THEY LEAVE OUR BORDER.

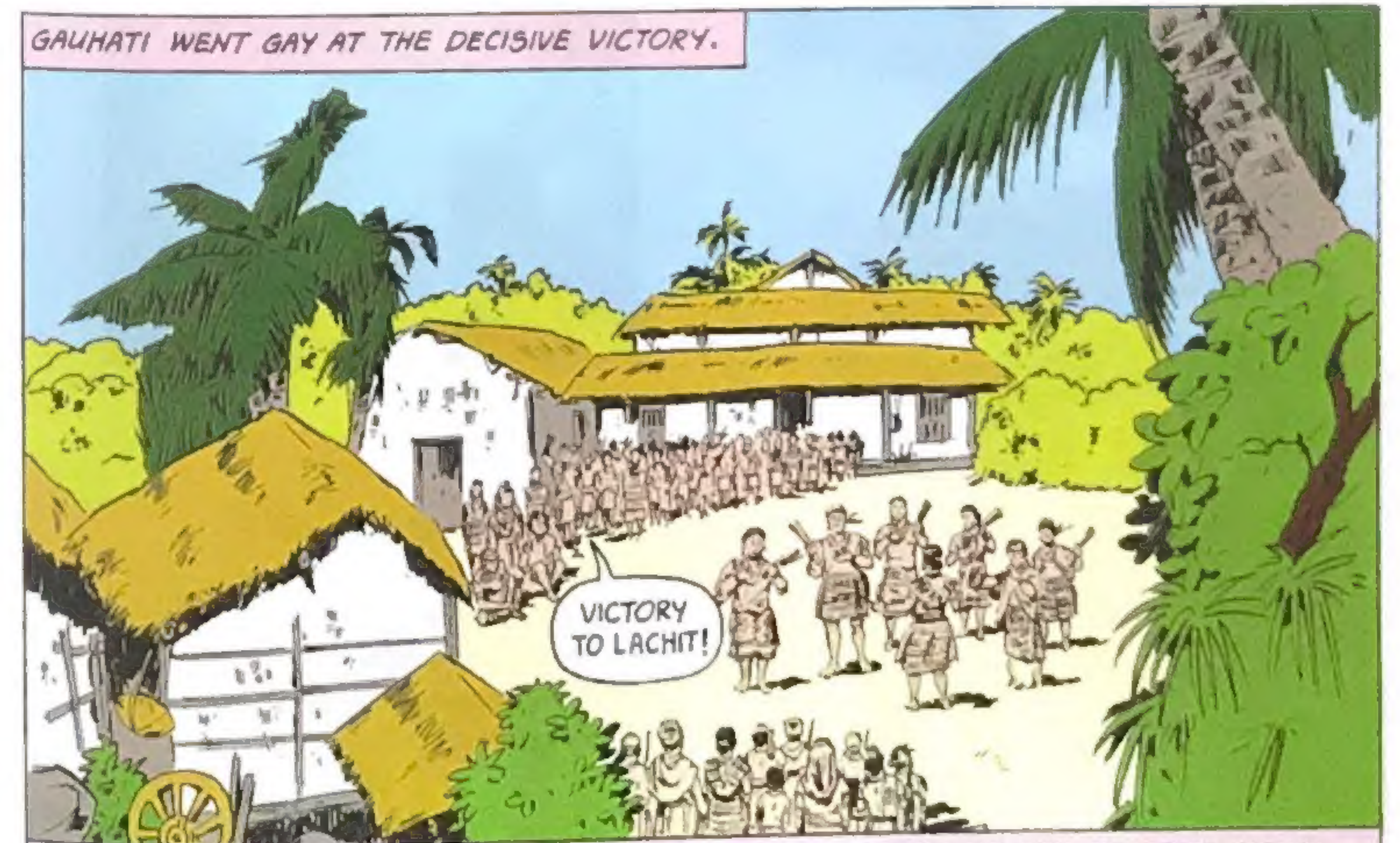
SIR, PERMIT US TO FALL UPON THEM. WE'LL BRING RICH BOOTY.



NO. LET'S NOT TARNISH THE FAIR NAME OF OUR KING AND OUR COUNTRY BY PLUNDERING FUGITIVE SOLDIERS.



GAUHATI WENT GAY AT THE DECISIVE VICTORY.



VICTORY TO LACHIT!

LACHIT DID NOT LIVE LONG AFTER THE BATTLE OF SARAIGHAT AS HIS FAMOUS NAVAL ENCOUNTER HAS COME TO BE KNOWN. HE DIED HAPPY IN THE THOUGHT THAT HE HAD DONE HIS DUTY BY HIS KING AND HIS COUNTRY.